

Intervention statement – to the 32nd UN Working Group of Experts on People from African Descent.

Karamzo Saccoh - African Australian delegation

Chairperson, member states, delegates, I would like to acknowledge the diverse voices and contributions to the 32nd UN Working Group of Experts on People from African Descent.

On behalf of the first African-Australian Delegation to WGEPAD, it has been insightful to hear the concerns of people of African descent in various parts of the world and the work some of you are doing to elevate these concerns.

We have listened, learned, and connected with the deep passion you have shown about the plight of people from African Descent. We are filled with hope and energy to continue to advocate for genuine racial equality, rights, and economic empowerment of people of African descent in Australia.

One of the realisations for us in these past couple of days is how little is known about the presence and contribution of people of African descent in Australia, including the fact that 12 people of African descent arrived in Australia as prisoners, in chains, in a British convict ship in 1788.

Since the arrival of these men, the journey of people of African descent and their communities has been long and faced with many difficulties including racism, discrimination, and inequality in many aspects of the Australian life.

In the first half of the 20th century there was nearly no migration of peoples of African descent to Australia due to the Immigration Restriction Act or the White Australia Policy.

Since this ended in the late 1960s, there have been waves of African immigrants from all corners of the continent and in 2023 constituting half a million Australians of African descent. The African community of skilled migrants and refugees has grown and dispersed across the country since and is rapidly growing.

People of African descent continue to make significant contribution to the Australian live, including in business, education, arts and carrying the hopes of Australians in sporting competitions. Despite these developments there remains significant obstacles to improving the economic empowerment of people of African descent as highlighted in the working group's interim report.

We thank the working Group for visiting Australia last December and producing an interim report that highlighted these challenges. We hope to continue to work with the Working Group and local community organisations to lobby for change through the Australia Government to improve the human rights and social-economic situation of people of African descent.

Thank you.

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